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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT

FRIDAY, JANUARY 12, 2007

In Today's Papers

Speculation Continues on Moldovan Plane Crash near Baghdad
Hurriyet, Milliyet, Sabah, Radikal, Cumhuriyet, Zaman, Yeni Safak and others report that an Iraqi insurgent group, Iraq Islam Army, has claimed responsibility for the downing of the Moldovan cargo plane which killed 34 people, most of them Turks, earlier this week north of Baghdad. Basing its page one report on accounts by eyewitnesses, Cumhuriyet quotes some Turks working at the US Airbase Anaconda as saying the plane was shot down. The paper adds it is not clear whether the plane couldn't land in its first attempt due to fog or Americans did not allow the landing due to heavy flight traffic in and out of the airbase. Several papers say international wire agencies like Itar-Tass and al-Arabiya report that the plane was brought down. Yeni Safak claims that Americans are holding the plane's black box and making no announcement about the cause of the crash. All papers report that the US Ankara Embassy said a Turkish team has been carrying out an investigation on the crash supported by the US Embassy in Baghdad. A prosecutor in Turkey's southern city of Adana, where the flight originated, said information claiming that the plane was downed "did not reflect the truth."

Reaction to the New Iraq Strategy

All papers: The Turkish Foreign Ministry, in a written statement on Thursday, welcomed the plan announced by President Bush but avoided comment on details of the plan. In the statement, the ministry recalled Turkey's own priorities, such as enhancing security and stability in Iraq, preserving the unity of the country and a consensual decision on the future of the oil-rich town Kirkuk, and promised to support the US within this framework. The Ministry also welcomed Bush's implicit reference to the PKK that the US "will work with the governments of Turkey and Iraq to help them resolve problems along their border," and the need for the US, Turkish and Iraqi governments to work together to eliminate the terrorist threat. Hurriyet and Vatan say that Washington passed the ball to the Iraqi government on the PKK issue. Radikal says the Turkish Foreign Ministry gave a balanced response to the US plan.

Cumhuriyet reported that President Bush avoided mentioning the name of PKK and instead referred to the issue as a 'border problem' between Turkey and Iraq. Instead of seeking dialogue with Iraq's neighbors, Bush sent threats to Iran and Syria and the world media has voiced strong reactions to the new plan, Cumhuriyet added. Zaman said the implementation of the new Iraq plan started with a raid on the Iranian Consulate in northern Iraq.

Erdogan on Kirkuk, Bush's New Iraq Strategy

All papers report that in an interview with the all-news channel NTV, Prime Minister Erdogan rejected a recent statement by US Baghdad Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad that Kirkuk was Iraq's internal problem. "Is Khalilzad an Iraqi national; whom is he speaking for? If this is an internal problem, then how can we explain the US presence in Iraq?" said Erdogan, stressing Turkey will not remain a silent bystander in the face of what is happening in Kirkuk. Erdogan added, "We have historic and kinship ties with the Iraqis. A referendum fait accompli in Kirkuk will not be recognized by the international community." Khalilzad had said at a joint press conference with President Talabani in Suleymaniye that intervention in Iraq's domestic issues by outside forces was "unacceptable," adding that cooperation with the Kurds was the main factor for progress in Iraq. Commenting on President Bush's new Iraq strategy, Erdogan said Turkey expected concrete steps from the US against the PKK. "We will see how honest they are, whether it will bring a concrete result. We have our own strategy and tactics. We don't have to disclose them, we will do what is to be done. I'm in constant touch with our special anti-terror envoy Baser," Erdogan emphasized.

Editorial Commentary on President Bush's New Iraq Strategy

Mehmet Y. Yilmaz commented in the mass appeal Hurriyet: "It seems President Bush remains unaware of the real problem in Iraq. Had he

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managed to comprehend the Iraq issue correctly, he wouldn't have made the additional 21,500 troops the main priority. The essence of Iraq's problem stems from the fact that the former Baath administration failed to create a real Iraqi nation. Thus the enmity and mistrust among Sunni and Shiite Arabs cannot be settled regardless of the additional number of troops. By insisting on that mistaken policy, Iraq is rushing toward division. In reality, Kurds in the north have already established their state as they wait to implement the Kirkuk plan when the timing is right. Everybody should make its plans and assessments based on these realities, Turkey in particular."

Gungor Mengi wrote in the mass appeal Vatan: "Here are the facts; see if you can call it justice: The US and Iraq committed the same crimes, while one leader was hanged, and the other is offering a solution for the devastation that he caused. The Bush plan actually does not provide any dim hope for a solution to Iraq. When it comes to the PKK issue, President Bush does not seem to be reading the problem correctly. He did not mention the PKK's name -- that only was mentioned in the outline document without giving any guarantees.

Instead President Bush, in his address, described the issue as a problem to be worked on under Iraq's leadership. Even average American tourists who happen to visit Turkey can understand that the nature of the PKK problem actually goes beyond being a border issue.

President Bush looks like a defeated figure wondering what to do in the midst of the debris he created."

Derya Sazak commented in the mainstream Milliyet (1/12): "Although the Bush plan is called a new strategy, the fact of the matter is that there is nothing new except sending an additional 20,000 troops to Iraq. History repeats itself as the US administration reminds us of the Vietnam era. The more it tries to get out, the more it finds itself swamped. Bush also made threatening remarks against Syria and Iran. The US operation on the Iranian representatives in Erbil proved that he means it. Regarding the PKK, Turkey's expectations from the US remain up in the air. The Turkish PM Erdogan fails to understand the fact that the US is building Iraq's future with a Kurdish and Shiite alliance and he will not take any concrete steps against Kurds during the election year."

Radikal reports that the Foreign Relations Committee in the Parliament decided to send a delegation to the US to lobby against the Armenian Genocide Resolution. During the one hour meeting yesterday, the Commission members highlighted the fact that with the assignment of Nancy Pelosi to the House of Representatives, the possibility for the resolution to pass in Congress increased immensely. Commission leader Mehmet Dulger was assigned to set the travel date together with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

TV Highlights
NTV (6 a.m.)

Domestic News

- Turkish Parliament's foreign affairs commission plans to invite US counterparts to Turkey and to send a delegation to Washington to fight against Armenian genocide claims.

- Turkey's Kurdish question will be discussed at a conference in Ankara on Saturday and Sunday. President Sezer and Prime Minister Erdogan have been invited to the opening which will be addressed by acclaimed novelist Yasar Kemal.

- Turkish General Staff Chief General Yasar Buyukanit said Turkey extends support to the EU membership of Bulgaria and Romania.

- Top state and government officials joined a reception held yesterday evening to mark the 80th anniversary of the national

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intelligence service MIT.

- Turkish Parliament has approved a bill for the appointment of 15 new university rectors, overriding the veto of President Sezer.

- The Turkish Central Bank Governor Durmus Yilmaz acknowledged responsibility for the failure to meet the 5 percent inflation target in 2006. Yilmaz also warned companies about a new financial market shock, telling them to manage exchange rate risks better.

International News

- US forces stormed an Iranian government representative office in the northern Iraqi city of Erbil and arrested five people, including diplomats and staff.

- The Financial Times said the removal of Lokmaci footbridge in the buffer zone in Nicosia has bolstered the standing of Turkish Cyprus leader Mehmet Ali Talat with the Greek Cypriots and the European Union.

- German Government commissioner for migration and refugees said Turks who have lost German nationality for keeping secret their dual Turkish nationality will not be expelled from Germany.

- The trial of former Bosnian Serb general Dragomir Milosevic, accused of directing the siege of Sarajevo that caused more than 10,000 deaths during the Bosnian war, began yesterday before the UN war crimes tribunal in The Hague.

- The New York based Human Rights Watch said in its annual report released Thursday that Israel and Hezbollah violated war laws this summer.

<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/ankara/>

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